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BREAKING THE PATTERN

How Alberta
Communities
Can Help

This booklet is part of a series called Breaking the Pattern. It was developed by and for Alberta citizens, to help address the problem of family violence in Alberta. Several hundred Albertans contributed ideas, experience and materials, in the hope they could help people in their own and other communities.

In that spirit of helpful cooperation, readers are encouraged to photocopy and distribute any or all portions of this booklet.

*Other booklets in the series are:
Breaking the Pattern: Understanding Wife Abuse
Breaking the Pattern: Resource Booklet*

Copies of all three booklets are available free of charge, from:

Office for the Prevention of Family Violence

11th floor, South Tower,

10030 - 107 St.,

Edmonton, Alberta

T5J 3E4

(403) 422-5916

BREAKING THE PATTERN

How Alberta
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Can Help

HOW TO START

1. Identify the community's needs and priorities. This should be done in consultation with community members and leaders.

2. Establish a committee.

3. Develop a plan of action. This should include a timeline, a list of tasks, and a list of responsible parties. The plan should also include a budget and a list of resources.

4. Implement the plan. This should be done in a systematic and organized manner. Regular communication and reporting should be maintained.

5. Monitor progress.

6. Evaluate the results.

7. Report back to the community.

8. Celebrate success. This should be done in a public and meaningful way. This will help to build community pride and encourage future action.

9. Continue to work on the issue. This should be done in a systematic and organized manner. Regular communication and reporting should be maintained.



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BREAKING THE PATTERN

How Alberta Communities Can Help

WHERE TO START

You wouldn't have opened this booklet if you were not concerned about family violence.

You are not alone.

Hundreds — perhaps thousands — of Albertans are working in their communities (maybe your community) to understand family violence, to change attitudes, to help those caught in the cycle of violence.

This booklet gives you basic information about how communities can address the problem of family violence. It will help you understand:

1. Where to start
2. What help might be needed
3. What one person can do
4. How a group of concerned citizens can work together to ensure that "what's needed becomes available in their community."

WEAKING THE PATTERN

How Adults
Communicate
Can Help

WEAK TO START

You know, I've spent the last 10 years
trying to help you understand the world.

And you know

that the world is a very complex place.
It's not just a collection of facts and figures.
It's a collection of people and their lives.
And it's a collection of things that are
changing all the time.

So I've tried to help you understand
the world as it is, and as it's changing.
I've tried to help you see the world
as a collection of people and their lives.

1. What is the world?
2. What does the world look like?
3. What does the world sound like?
4. How is the world changing?
5. What is the world's future?
6. What is the world's past?
7. What is the world's present?
8. What is the world's future?
9. What is the world's past?
10. What is the world's present?

BREAKING THE PATTERN

How Alberta Communities Can Help

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SECTION ONE: AN APPROACH TO MEETING NEEDS

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INTRODUCTION

Family violence is a problem that affects us all in one way or another. We may have experienced it personally or know someone who has. It may be a factor in the work we do or it may be affecting life in our community.

Family violence is a complex problem. To understand its dynamics, we must look beyond the family to community systems and society's values and attitudes; all of which contribute to the problem in some way.

WHY FAMILY VIOLENCE HAPPENS

No act of violence is simply the pitting of one individual against another; each contains deep cultural and psychological meanings. At the same time, no act of violence is merely the expression of a social problem (or a culture) such as poverty or unemployment or male dominance; each is also the personal act of a unique individual."

Breines and Gordon

Sometimes family violence happens as a result of overwhelming stress, when the personal and/or material resources of the family members become so overloaded that despair and/or frustration trigger violent reactions. This kind of family violence can happen in any family. However, it does not usually persist and become part of the family's ongoing pattern of interacting.

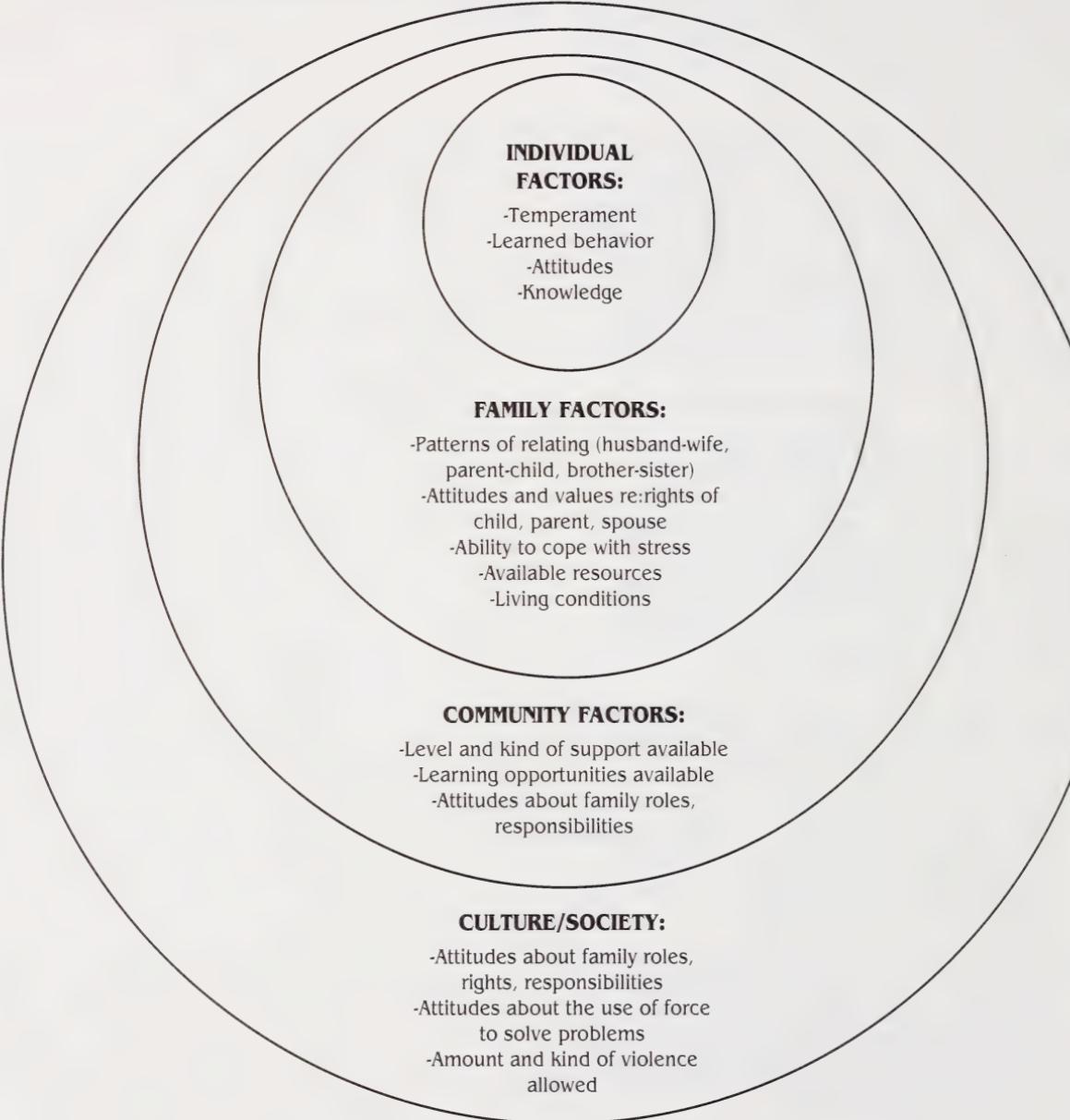
Most family violence which is persistent and part of the family's ongoing pattern occurs in two quite different types of families:

1. FAMILIES in which extreme control is exercised by one or more persons; where intimidation and/or force are used to make other family members do what the controlling person(s) wants.
2. FAMILIES in which there is little consistent structure; where abuse is used by family members as an expression of anger or in competitive situations in which one person insists on having the upper hand or winning arguments.

COMMUNITIES can contribute to family violence if they believe that families should be self-sufficient and therefore offer little support for them; if they maintain that the privacy of the family is a higher value than the well-being of individual family members.

SOCIETAL ATTITUDES which support the use of force to control people contribute to family violence.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE



**INDIVIDUAL
FACTORS:**

- Temperament
- Learned behavior
- Attitudes
- Knowledge

FAMILY FACTORS:

- Patterns of relating (husband-wife, parent-child, brother-sister)
- Attitudes and values re:rights of child, parent, spouse
- Ability to cope with stress
- Available resources
- Living conditions

COMMUNITY FACTORS:

- Level and kind of support available
- Learning opportunities available
- Attitudes about family roles, responsibilities

CULTURE/SOCIETY:

- Attitudes about family roles, rights, responsibilities
- Attitudes about the use of force to solve problems
- Amount and kind of violence allowed

A. AN APPROACH TO MEETING NEEDS

Violent incidents are the most visible part of abusive relationships, so services are often geared to what is needed during a crisis. Of course crisis services are important, but if we are going to make a long-term difference, we also need to deal with the context in which the abuse occurs.

That means taking into account the factors that contribute to the problem (see chart on page 8).

It means planning how to help those who are most likely to be in contact with the troubled family. That might include friends, family, police, social workers, doctors, counsellors, lawyers and other "front-line" people.

And it means taking preventive action, as well as offering crisis intervention and follow-up services.

A lot to do? Of course. But not impossible. Not if we work together.

The next few pages suggest what sort of help might be needed by the people in the situation and those around them. A summary page at the end illustrates how it all fits together.

Section Two describes steps you might take to ensure that "what's needed" becomes available in your community.

We are using wife abuse as an example to illustrate how to use the process that is being recommended.

B. PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND FOLLOW-UP FOR:

1. People in abusive relationships



FOR THE ABUSED PERSON

TIMING

In the early stages (PREVENTIVE approaches)

WHAT THE ABUSED PERSON MIGHT NEED

- Self-esteem
- Understanding of the cycle of violence
- Understanding that she does not deserve to be beaten
- Understanding that the violence is real, even though she would like to deny it
- Understanding that even though she cares for her partner, she is not responsible for his actions; she does not cause the violence
- Understanding that her partner will not stop the violence as long as she accepts it and makes excuses for it

HOW IT MIGHT BE PROVIDED

Since the situation is probably not public, potential helpers are likely to be friends, family, or those with whom she has informal contact.

Thus, helping them to be informed and supportive listeners may be a constructive approach:

- Public information (articles, films, talk, etc.) about the cycle of violence
- In-services to help professionals (e.g. doctors) recognize the early signs of violence, and what they might say to the women
- Self-confidence or communication courses the woman might attend
- People talking to people (awareness vs. ignorance) will help

In the violent stages (CRISIS Services)

- Physical safety for her and her children
- Time to heal, physically and emotionally
- Financial support
- School for the children
- Knowledge of her legal options
- Help to sort out her relationship options
- Patience and understanding of her ambivalence about staying or leaving the relationship
- Knowledge that she is not alone

- Police or other services to stop the violence
- Emergency housing for her and the children
- Emergency transportation to housing
- Child care services; people to see that children's schooling continues
- Public assistance or other financial support
- Counselling to help her heal, and understand her options
- A volunteer advocate who stays with her during the crisis, and is available to help her deal with longer-term issues: housing, finance, etc.

FOR THE ABUSED PERSON

TIMING

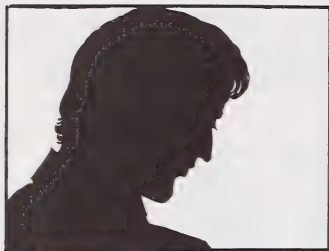
After the crisis (FOLLOW-UP Services if she leaves the violent relationship)

WHAT THE ABUSED PERSON MIGHT NEED

- Physical safety
- Patience for her ambivalence
- Help to assess the reality and safety of her situation
- Respect for her decisions (to stay or to leave the relationship)
- Housing
- Financial support
- Schooling or child care
- Exploration of longer-term issues: employment, on-going emotional support, etc.

HOW IT MIGHT BE PROVIDED

- Restraining order/peace bond
- Assistance to re-locate
- A volunteer advocate to help her deal with practicalities, legal issues, etc.
- Self-help groups or other opportunities to meet others who have been in her situation
- On-going counselling and emotional support
- Employment training/career planning



FOR THE ABUSING PERSON

TIMING

In the early stages (PREVENTIVE approaches)

WHAT THE ABUSING PERSON MIGHT NEED

- He needs to understand that he does not need physical power to be a worthwhile man
- Understanding that he is responsible for his own actions
- Self-esteem
- Understanding that violence is not acceptable

HOW IT MIGHT BE PROVIDED

- Public awareness/public attitude discussions about violence being unacceptable — even at home
- Wife, neighbors, friends making him accountable for his actions; not “covering” or making excuses for him (might need education for them)
- Self-confidence or communication courses
- Anger management sessions

In the violent stage (CRISIS intervention)

- External restraint to stop the violence
- Understanding that violence is not acceptable
- Understanding that hitting his wife is assault, and assault is a crime
- Understanding that he is responsible for his own actions

- Police or other intervention to stop the violence
- Being physically separated from wife and children (different location; restraining order, etc.)
- Being charged with assault*

After the crisis (FOLLOW-UP)

- Understanding he is responsible for his actions
- Being made accountable for his behavior
- External restraint
- Learning other ways to express anger

- Being convicted of assault*
- Being physically separated from the family as long as there is any possibility of violence
- Counselling groups to explore the sources of his violence
- Anger management sessions
- Wife, family, friends, legal system holding him accountable (might need education and support for them)

**Studies in Canada and the United States indicate that when abusers are charged and convicted of assault, they are 40% to 70% less likely to repeat the offense.*



FOR THE CHILDREN

TIMING

Early stages (PREVENTION)

WHAT THE CHILDREN MIGHT NEED

- Understanding they are not responsible for their parents' unhappiness
- Understanding they are loveable and worthwhile
- Understanding they are not the only children to have this experience

HOW IT MIGHT BE PROVIDED

- Stories, books, films in children's libraries, schools
- Contact with supportive adults who understand the situation (e.g. an adult who grew up in a violent home but has overcome the problems)

Violent stage (CRISIS intervention)

- Physical safety
- Knowing they will be looked after
- Understanding the crisis is not their fault
- As much stability as possible — regular routines, same school, etc.
- Understanding their parents love them, even though their actions may not make it obvious

- Emergency housing
- Child care; adults who can ensure regular routines, school attendance, etc.
- A supportive adult friend who can help the child understand s/he's not responsible, s/he is worthwhile and loveable

After the violence (FOLLOW-UP services)

- As much stability as possible
- Information about what is happening and how it will affect the child
- Fun
- Learning non-violent ways to behave
- Help in overcoming the trauma

- Adults who can ensure regular routines, school attendance, etc.
- An adult friend (teacher, librarian, youth worker, volunteer)
- Help to express feelings: play therapy, counselling, "feelings" activities through elementary school

2. People who try to help

WHAT PROFESSIONALS MIGHT NEED

- Training to help them understand the sources and dynamics of family violence
- Training to learn specific intervention strategies; and how to use resource materials
- Policies which allow them to be flexible and appropriate in their responses to family violence
- Back-up support to reduce possibility of being physically endangered
- On-going emotional support to help them deal with their own frustration
- Opportunities to work with those in other fields; operating procedures that enable inter-agency co-operation
- Knowledge of community politics
- Recognition and respect; appreciation that they are doing the best they can
- Sharing success stories

WHAT VOLUNTEERS MIGHT NEED (CAREGIVERS, FRIENDS, CONCERNED CITIZENS)

- Easy access to information, resource people, services
- Training to help them understand the sources and dynamics of family violence
- Training to learn specific intervention strategies
- Knowledge of community politics
- Opportunities to collaborate with professionals; acceptance and respect for the valuable role of volunteers
- Back-up support to reduce possibility of being physically endangered
- On-going emotional support to help them deal with their own frustration
- Sharing success stories

3. The community

WHAT THE COMMUNITY MIGHT NEED

- Public awareness activities to influence attitudes about violence, the sanctity of the family, and other prevailing values
- Public education to understand the sources and dynamics of family violence
- Information about the incidence of family violence in their own community
- Information about what actions are being taken
- Information about what services and resources are available — e.g. regional shelters, counselling, education, laws and their enforcement, etc.
- Understanding that family violence is in every community; theirs is not a “bad” community, just a normal one

C. SUMMARY OF A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON WHAT'S NEEDED:

AN OVER-ALL PERSPECTIVE

Preventive Approaches

- Public awareness/public education about family violence
- Self-confidence/communication courses that might be attended by those in abusive relationships
- Self-help groups, counselling, or other services for "at risk" families
- Public awareness/public education about attitudes and values that foster non-abusive relationships
- Professional awareness, education, support
- Collaboration between professionals and volunteers

Crisis Intervention Services

- Police/legal protection
- Emergency medical services
- Emergency housing
- Emergency transportation
- Emergency child care
- Physical restraint, assault charge for violent person
- Crisis counselling
- Volunteer advocate to stay with abused person

Follow-Up Services

- Volunteer advocates to stay in touch with abused person, abuser, children
- Co-ordination of agency services: police, medical, counselling, financial assistance, housing, etc.
- Co-operation between professionals in developing public awareness, common approaches, networks
- Big Brother/Big Sister or other programs to allow children to have contact with adults who are not in crisis
- Public education and policy so abusing person is held accountable for his actions by wife, friends, legal system
- Longer-term housing, financial support, employment training, etc. for abused person
- Support groups
- Counselling for each member of the family
- Continued work on public attitudes

BREAKING THE PATTERN

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SECTION TWO: TAKING COMMUNITY ACTION

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A. CAN ONE PERSON MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes, one person can make a difference. It was because of the efforts of one person, Helen Nimco, former Director of Banff Family and Community Support Services, that the predecessor of this booklet came about. Helen's concern about wife abuse in her own community led her to seek out information. Her concern about the difficulty of finding information led her to propose that a handbook be developed. Her proposal led to hundreds of people becoming involved. The outcome of all this involvement was the publication of **BREAKING THE PATTERN: HOW ALBERTA COMMUNITIES CAN HELP ASSAULTED WOMEN**. Several thousand copies have now been distributed across Alberta and elsewhere.

Most of the women's shelters in Alberta, and most of the other services available, started from one person's concern.

When one person is concerned, becomes informed, and talks to other people, positive things begin to happen.

You've already taken the first step. You must be concerned, or you would not be reading this booklet. Some other things you can do are listed on the following pages.

Our purpose is not to prescribe "the answers" for you and your community. Rather, the following are steps you can take, and a process you can adapt, so you and your community can find the answers that will work for you.

1. Become Informed

a. Read

The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence has information about all types of family violence. Call or write to them for the specific information you need.

Many excellent books have been written about family violence. Your local library may have some, or may be able to get specific books for you through inter-library loans.

Once you start looking for information, you'll notice that newspapers and magazines often have news items and articles about family violence. (Media attention is an encouraging sign that the public is beginning to care about the problem.)

If you are concerned about wife abuse, a resource booklet which is part of the **BREAKING THE PATTERN** series is available from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. (See inside front cover, for address). It contains information about a variety of resources that will be helpful to you and your community as you work together in addressing this problem.

b. Watch

Many videos and films about family violence are now available. Check with the National Film Board, the Provincial Film Library and other film libraries for lists of what you can rent or borrow.

As you begin to seek out information, you will notice that family violence is often the topic of television shows and movies.

c. Listen

As you think and learn about family violence, you may notice that your sensitivities change. Comments you would not have noticed before may now jump out at you, as reflections of the attitudes that foster family violence.

You may hear from people who have experienced abusive relationships. Listening will help you understand their situations.

d. Feel

As you read and watch and listen, your emotions will likely be touched. You may be shocked at some of the things you learn, or troubled to discover that you can identify with some aspects of abusive relationships. Thinking about family violence may bring back memories of difficult times in your own life.

Don't be afraid of your emotions. They are normal and valuable. Having a "feel" for what

abusive relationships are about will make you a more empathetic and effective helper, help you be realistic about how to approach the problem, and more able to make a difference in your community.

2. Talk to people

Who do you talk to? Whoever you have contact with. Friends. People you work with. People in community organizations.

What do you say? You can talk about how you feel as you learn about family violence. You can talk about discovering that family violence happens in your community. You can say you've learned that people in abusive relationships are not so different from other people. In cases of wife abuse, you can tell how the pattern of violence traps people in destructive situations. You can describe some of the approaches that might help.

In your conversations, you will be accomplishing three things:

- You will be getting emotional support for your reactions to what you are learning;
- You will be sharing information, so others become informed;
- You will be helping other people to care about the problem.

3. Find a group

A group of people concerned about family violence may already exist in your community. Here are some ways to find out:

- If your community has a Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) or Community Services program, the office staff may know if there is a group; consult FCSS and ask for their help;
- If your region has a women's shelter, the shelter almost certainly has a board of directors who may be concerned about other issues relating to family violence; the board may have sub-committees you could join;
- Existing groups (e.g. an FCSS project, a church group, a women's group, a service club) may be willing to form a sub-

committee to explore the issue of family violence;

- Watch your local paper for news items or advertisements that indicate other people are concerned about family violence.

4. Start a group

If you didn't find a group of concerned people in your community, you may want to start your own group. Here's how:

a. Identify a few interested people

During your conversations with other people, you probably met some who seemed to be concerned too, or who were receptive to what you talked about.

Start by approaching them individually, to ask if they are interested in getting together with some people to talk about family violence. Four to six concerned people are enough to start a group.

b. Get together

When you have found four to six people who say they are interested in talking to other people about the problem, invite them to an informal get-together.

The location should be comfortable and informal — a kitchen, living room or small office would be appropriate.

First, make sure everyone is introduced to everyone else.

Then, explain that you've become concerned about family violence, that you know it happens in your community, and that you thought they might be concerned too. Invite others to tell why they came to the get-together.

When you've had a chance to find out everyone's particular interest, the group members can decide:

- Do they want to learn more about the problem, together? (They could start by sharing copies of this booklet and the companion booklet: *Breaking the Pattern: Understanding Wife Abuse*.)
- Do they want to get together again?

- Do they want to start a process to get others in the community concerned? (Part B of this section suggests steps to follow.)
- Do they want to involve other people?

The group members may decide they just want to have a conversation, and not pursue the issue further. That's not a waste of time. People talking will mean more people in the community are informed and interested.

However, if the group decides to get together again, you could handle the next get-together as follows.

c. The second get-together

Again choose a comfortable informal location. If there are new people, make sure everyone is introduced and explain what happened at the first get-together. Give everyone a chance to tell why they are there, so everyone understands everyone else's motivation.

If the group decided at its first get-together that it just wanted to have informal conversations, then do that. People sharing their thoughts and feelings increases understanding in the community.

If the group decided at its first get-together that it wanted to learn more about the problem, compare notes about what each person has learned since the last get-together, or have a special presentation at your meeting.

At the end of the get-together, ask "where do we go from here?" as you did at the end of the first get-together.

d. Turning point

As a group continues to meet informally, some changes are likely to occur:

- Even if the group started with a very low-key purpose ("Let's just get together and talk"), at some point a few people are likely to decide, "Let's try to **do** something in our community." The point at which four to six people say, "I'm concerned and I want to **take some action**" is the point at which you have a different kind of group.

- The group will probably experience a bit of tension and wheel-spinning as it begins to change its focus from informal sharing to action.
- The membership of the group is likely to change:
 - Some people will have got what they wanted from the informal conversations, or from the learning activities, and will drop out.
 - Other people will invite friends to join the group, so you will have new members too. Each time new people join, make sure they are introduced to everyone, and filled in on what has happened so far.
- The group will likely experience a "groping" stage as it adapts to new members and tries to define its new purpose.

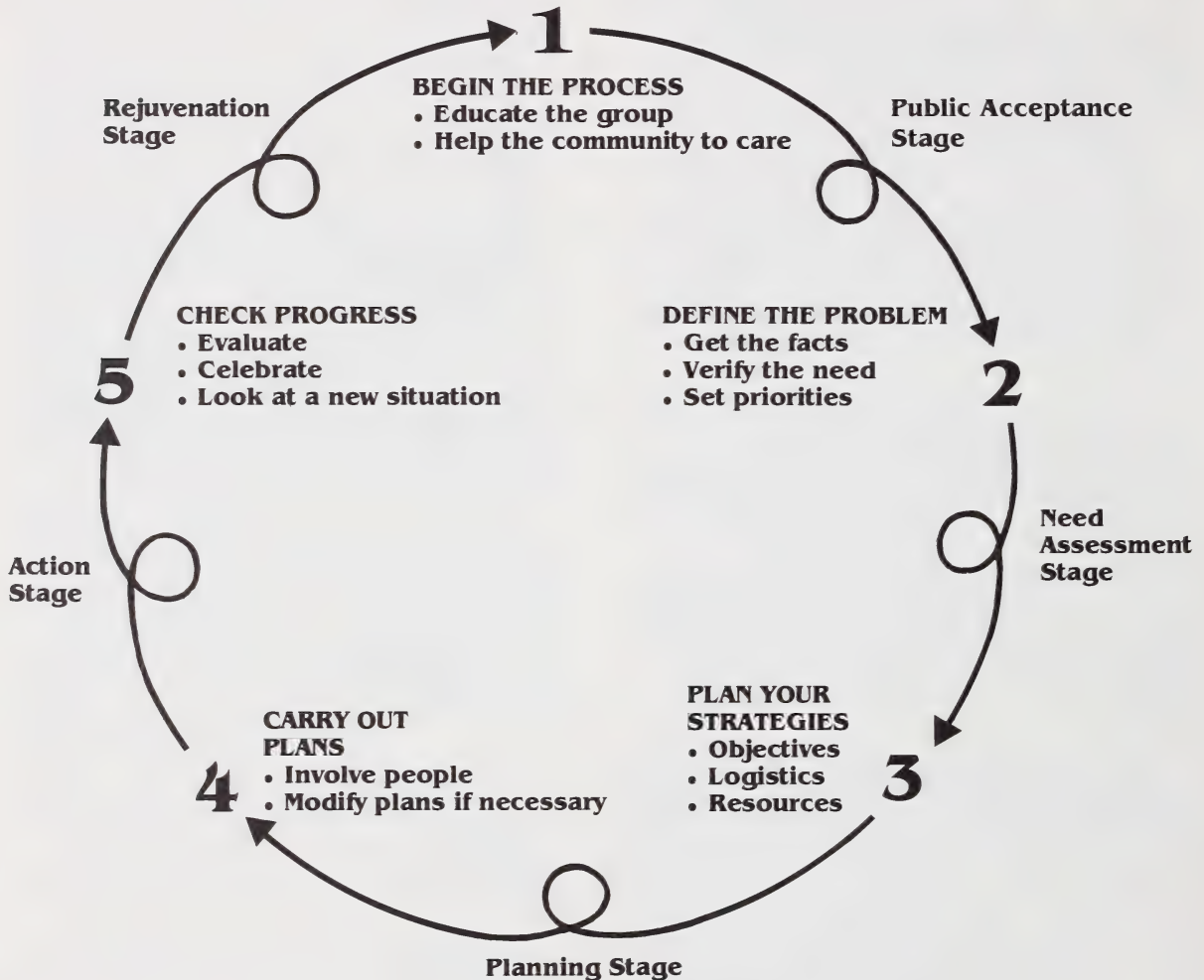
To this point, you have learned more about yourself, helped other people to become informed, shared thoughts and feelings, and increased the understanding of a few people in your community. You have already accomplished something.

Once you have a group of people who want to take some action, you are ready for the next stage: to make a more visible difference in your community. How to approach the task? Suggestions for a process begin on the next page ...

B. YES, THE COMMUNITY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A community group can help ensure that “what’s needed” to help reduce family violence becomes available in their community, by following a community process. The rest of this handbook explains more about the process.

A COMMUNITY PROCESS TO REDUCE FAMILY VIOLENCE



As the curly arrows illustrate, the process is not necessarily smooth. Sometimes it's one step forward and two steps back! But many groups have found that following the process gives them the greatest possible chance of reducing family violence in their community. The process will help your group get the help you need to find appropriate answers for your community.

It's no secret that family violence is not the easiest community issue to work on. Few if any community groups have had completely smooth progress. (If your group has difficulties from time to time, that means you're normal!)

To help increase your chances of reducing family violence, carry out a community process that has worked for many groups. Adapting the process to your situation will help you find answers that will work in your community.

FOLLOW ALONG while we outline ...

A. The TASK at each stage;

B. WHY this stage is necessary;

C. HOW a group might accomplish the tasks at this stage;

D. What BARRIERS a group might encounter;

E. What REWARDS a group can expect.

AND INTRODUCING ... TWO ALBERTA "COMMUNITIES"

To help illustrate the community process, we've invented two communities:



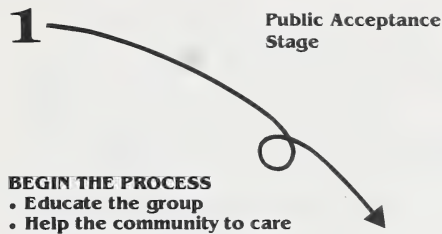
METRO CITY, an urban area which includes a major city surrounded by a cluster of large towns.



EVERGREEN DISTRICT, a rural region with several small communities located within a large, sparsely-populated area.

Following, we explain the steps at each stage of the community process, including "stories" of how Metro City and Evergreen District carried out the steps. The "stories" are adapted from the experiences of real communities.

We have used the problem of wife abuse to illustrate how the community process can be used to address the problem of family violence.



STAGE ONE: BEGIN THE PROCESS

A. The Task

The first task of your group is two-fold:

a. EDUCATE YOUR GROUP

Group members should be familiar with how and why family violence happens.

b. HELP THE COMMUNITY TO CARE

At this stage, you are not asking any member of the public to do anything. But you do want the public to be aware:

- that family violence exists in the community;
- how and why it can happen;
- that it matters.

B. Why this step is necessary

If group members do not understand how and why family violence can happen, and the cycle of violence, they may come up with inappropriate actions and solutions later on. Group members need a basic understanding of the problem so they will be realistic in their approaches.

Preliminary public education is necessary to generate public interest and public support for whatever action your group eventually takes. If the community does not believe there's a problem, or does not believe it matters, your group will not get the community help it's going to need.

C. How to carry out the tasks

a. Ideas to educate the group

- Have every group member read material to help them understand the problem they will be addressing.

- Contact the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence and ask for other background information to be sent to your group. Ask one or two people to summarize the main points and present them at a meeting.

- Watch a video or film at a meeting.

- Invite a social worker, counsellor, policeman, representative of a women's shelter, or other person who has contact with family violence to talk to your group. (You could invite others to this meeting too, and be educating the public as you educate your group.)

Call someone who is knowledgeable, and ask that person to suggest an appropriate speaker for your group.

- If you know a person who has been in a violent relationship but who has broken out of it and is willing to talk about the experience, invite that person to talk to your group.
- Provide time at meetings for members to talk about the feelings they experience as they learn more about the topic of family violence. This will provide emotional support to your group members, and also help the group anticipate what reactions they might get from other people in the community.
- Other ideas:

b. Ideas to help the community to care

NOTE: You are not asking for anything at this stage. You merely want the public to know **that the problem exists** and **that it matters**.

- IMPORTANT STEP: Identify key people in your community — those who are respected by many people, who influence others' opinions, whose support might be valuable in the future. Key people are those whose good opinion helps the community feel a particular project is legitimate and worth supporting (sometimes key people are called "legitimizers").

Decide who will talk to each of the key people, to discuss what you are learning, and to tell the key people what your group is doing.

(Key people like to know what is going on in the community. If key people do not believe the problem exists, or that it matters, their lack of support may block your group later on.)

- Have each member agree to have a casual conversation about what they are learning about family violence, with three different people, before the next meeting. (If you have seven group members, that's 21 more people in the community who will have exposure to the ideas.)

1

Public Acceptance
Stage

BEGIN THE PROCESS

- Educate the group
- Help the community to care

- As your group becomes better informed, offer to give presentations to church groups, service clubs, or other groups.
 - Sponsor information sessions about family violence. Extend personal invitations to key people and other potentially interested citizens. Use films, speakers, panel presentations, followed by question and answer sessions, to help explain violent relationships.
 - If your local papers run columns by agency representatives, ask the agency representatives if they would do a column on family violence.
 - Provide your local paper, radio station, or community TV channel with information about what you are doing. Ask local media to run news items about your activities. (Note: Be careful that your media coverage is not distorted! Spend time with local editors/reporters to be sure they have accurate information.)
 - Other ideas:
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IMPORTANT: As your group moves through subsequent steps, remember to keep key individuals and the public informed about what you are doing.

**HOW THE TWO "COMMUNITIES" HANDLED
STAGE ONE**



In METRO CITY, the urban area with a major city surrounded by a cluster of large towns, staff and volunteers from a city crisis line became concerned about the number of calls they received about violence between spouses.

They contacted representatives from the city's emergency women's shelter, and from the police, for initial meetings to see if these agencies were experiencing a lot of calls. They were. The group members compared notes about their experiences and thought, "Who else might be interested?"

The group thought of 30 other agencies and organizations who might have a concern about family violence. Letters were written to the executive directors and/or chairmen of the boards of these other organizations. The letters said, in effect, "We are concerned about family violence and we thought you might be too. We're not sure what we can do, but are you interested in working with us to figure something out?" The letters were followed up with a phone call and/or a visit.



In EVERGREEN DISTRICT, a rural area with several small communities located within a large sparsely-populated area, a woman in one of the

communities became concerned about wife abuse.

She talked to some friends, one of whom was from another community which had a

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) program. The friend talked to the FCSS director, who did some quiet checking with social workers and police. This preliminary check revealed that wife abuse did indeed exist in the district.

The FCSS director met with the woman and three of her friends. The group decided the issue was too big for one community to tackle. They came up with a list of contacts in five communities in the district, and in the next few months found opportunities for conversations in which they let others know the problem existed, and sounded out if others were concerned.

D. Barriers you may encounter during Step One

• GROUP IMPATIENCE:

Some of your group members may be restless about educating themselves and the community. They may be anxious to “get busy and **do** something,” rather than taking time to become better informed.

(Learning about some of the damage done by community groups who jumped in before they understood the problem may help restless members realize that taking time to become well-informed is not a waste of time. Sponsoring public awareness events — a concrete action — may help restless members feel they are doing something.)

• COMMUNITY RESISTANCE:

As soon as you begin talking about family violence, you may encounter community attitudes such as, “It doesn’t happen in our community,” “Women ask for it,” or “It’s none of our business what happens within a family.” The group should discuss how it will respond to these attitudes.

(Hearing from someone who has experienced the problem — in person, by reading anecdotes, or by watching video or film — may have enough emotional impact to help shake some of these attitudes.)

- In rural communities, people may be particularly reluctant to acknowledge that family violence could exist among their neighbors and friends. If they are aware of violence in specific families, they may be even more uncomfortable about “opening up a can of worms” and might prefer that nobody talked about the issue of family violence.

(Helping them understand that violence happens in all communities and that help is possible, **may** make it easier for them to acknowledge the problem.)

- In urban communities, it will be harder to identify key individuals, or to reach the community at large. (It will probably be necessary to break the “community” into smaller target groups and decide how to reach each target group.)

E. Rewards from Stage One

• YOU’LL BE REALISTIC

Your group will be better informed about family violence, and thus more realistic in its approaches to solving the problem. Taking time to become informed will avoid costly mistakes later on.

• INCREASED POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

As a result of your low-key and informal conversations, and letting others know what you are learning, the community will **gradually** be more receptive to acknowledging that family violence exists, and that it matters. You are paving the way for community support when your group takes action later on.

• LONG-TERM PREVENTIVE POSSIBILITIES

Increasing public awareness and understanding of the problem will also contribute to long-term prevention of family violence.

2

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

- Get the facts
- Verify the need
- Set priorities

Need Assessment Stage

STAGE TWO: DEFINE THE PROBLEM — NEED ASSESSMENT PHASE

A. The Task

Having educated your group members about the nature of family violence, and begun the process of raising public awareness, you are ready to find more specific information. During the need assessment phase, you have three tasks:

1. **GET THE FACTS** — about family violence in your own community: the extent of the problem, the needs of those in violent relationships, the resources that already exist, gaps that may exist.
2. **VERIFY THE NEED** — verify your conclusions with your sources of information, with key people in the community, and with the public.
3. **SET PRIORITIES** — decide what needs your group will focus on.

B. Why this stage is necessary

Your group needs to **GET THE FACTS** about family violence in your specific community, to know what is needed, to provide a basis for your planning, and to help set priorities. Getting specific information helps provide a “reality base” for the group’s actions.

Your group needs to **VERIFY THE NEED** with your sources of information, with key people in the community, and with the public, to be sure you understand the situation, and to be sure key people and the public at large believe there is a problem. Verifying the need will help establish your group’s credibility with the community.

Your group needs to **SET PRIORITIES** about what aspect of the need it will address,

because no group can do everything. Better to develop a focussed, effective effort than scatter your energy and not accomplish much of anything.

C. How to carry out the need assessment tasks

1. Get the facts

In the Beginning Stage of your community action process, you gathered general information about family violence — how and why it happens, and what might be needed. Your task was to increase general understanding of violent relationships.

In the Need Assessment Stage, you want to find out more specific information about family violence in your community:

THE PROBLEM — how much family violence is known to occur in the community?

THE NEEDS — what are the needs of people in violent relationships? The needs of those who try to help? What community attitudes affect those in violent relationships?

THE RESOURCES — what services, expertise, and funding sources already exist to meet the needs?

THE GAPS — what is left to be done, to help reduce family violence in the community?

ASKING is really the only way to gather information about the extent of the problem, the needs, the resources and the gaps in regard to family violence in your community. A variety of methods — interviews, informal conversations, questionnaire surveys, checking statistical records — are all variations of **ASKING**.

WHO should you ask? Three groups:

- **AGENCIES AND PROFESSIONALS** who may have contact with wife abuse, such as:
 - police
 - Alberta Social Services district offices
 - clergy/Ministerial Associations
 - counselling agencies
 - doctors, medical associations, paramedics, hospital

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

- Get the facts
- Verify the need
- Set priorities

2



Need Assessment Stage

- information or crisis lines
 - courts, Legal Aid, lawyers, parole/probation officers
 - women's shelters (may get referrals from your area)
 - addictions counsellors
 - THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED violent relationships but are now distanced enough to have perspective about their experience. They can tell you more about what was or what would have been helpful to them, and what was missing.
 - KEY INDIVIDUALS and other members of the public. Getting their views about the problem, the needs, the resources and the gaps will not only give you another perspective of the community situation, it will help you anticipate what community attitudes you may have to deal with later.
 - Other ideas:
-
-
-

The following points should be kept in mind as you get the facts about the problem, the needs, the resources and the gaps in your community:

- You'll need to establish your credentials, i.e. what right you have to ask questions. Agencies and professionals in particular will want to know who you are and how you plan to use the information before they share their information and plans.
- We know the abused and abusing person try

to keep their violence a secret. A violent relationship often continues for a long time before it becomes public. As well, not every agency in contact with family violence recognizes occurrences of violence, or keeps records of these. Therefore, your group may find it difficult to estimate the extent of the problem in your community.

- Your community may have existing services that **could** serve those in violent relationships, but at the moment lack specific expertise. You'll want to know the quality as well as the type of services that exist.

When your group looks at the information you've gathered:

- the estimated extent of the problem in your community;
 - what is needed (prevention, intervention, and follow-up services, as listed in Section One of this booklet, and as amplified by people you've talked to); AND
 - what is already available (specifically appropriate for family violence);
- you will probably see things missing.

This becomes the preliminary basis of defining what needs you will address, and what your group's priorities will be.

But before you make hard decisions about future action, the group must **VERIFY THE NEED ...**

2. Verify the need

Having gathered information, you now want two things to happen:

- people outside the group to verify that you have correctly identified the needs and gaps;
- the public to accept that the need is real.

SOME WAYS TO VERIFY THE NEED:

- Go back to all the people you talked to in the information-gathering stage — agency and professional representatives, those who have experienced violent relationships, other individuals. Let them know what you

have found out, your preliminary conclusions, the gaps you've identified. (Gaps could include lack of public or professional education, non-existence of services, or existing services not specifically geared to family violence.)

Check: do the people you talked to agree with your findings? If not, re-assess and perhaps revise your information.

CAUTION: Be sure your information is credible before you go public! More than one Alberta group has run into barriers because their information was discredited. The public didn't believe the information, and so didn't believe the problems were real. It slowed down the process by several years.

- Make sure the "key individuals" (those who influence opinions) are well informed about your findings. Give them copies of your reports; have conversations with them. Be sure you understand their response to your information — their response might reflect the community's response.
- Once your information has been verified and accepted by people outside your group, let the public know.
 - Group members can have another round of informal conversations with whomever they are in contact;
 - Give presentations to community groups;
 - Run news releases to explain what you've done and how you've verified your information;
 - Hold public information meetings.

3. Set priorities

By now, your group will have a sense of the problems, the needs, the potential resources and the gaps in your community. This is a turning point for the group. It is moving from exploratory activities to concrete action.

Some groups ask an outside person — a

facilitator — to help them examine the issues and decisions the group must handle at this stage.

In light of the information you now have, the group has a major decision to make: of all the issues you **could** address, which issue(s) will the group focus on? The group has to decide:

THE GROUP PURPOSE, or reason for existence:

Should the group have a **broad** purpose (e.g. "to reduce family violence in the community")? OR Should it have a more **specific** purpose (e.g. "to ensure abused women have access to emergency services")?

Having made that decision, the group should now look at itself with new eyes, because past ways of operating may no longer be appropriate as the group moves from an exploratory to an action stage. It needs to review:

- **STRUCTURE**, or how the group is organized:

Should the group be an informal, loosely-knit organization? OR

Should the group be legally incorporated, with formal officers and procedures? (If the group expects to handle money, it should incorporate.)

- **THE MEMBERSHIP**, or who belongs to the group:

In light of the community needs to be addressed, and the purpose of the group, should other people be invited to join?

Many groups find it useful to include:

- one or two people who have experienced violent relationships;
- agency and professional representatives;
- people who have credibility in the community at large.

HOW THE URBAN "COMMUNITY" HANDLED STAGE TWO



When we left Metro City, representatives from a crisis line, the police and a women's emergency shelter had sent letters to about 30 organizations

2

DEFINE THE PROBLEM

- Get the facts
- Verify the need
- Set priorities



Need Assessment Stage

to ask if they would like to help find solutions to the problem of family violence. Twenty-five people agreed to attend an initial exploratory meeting.

The meeting participants talked about their experiences with family violence, and decided it would be useful to have more information. It seemed that each organization had a part of the story, but nobody had the total picture.

The participants chose a nine-member steering committee to work out how to compile information, and to keep everyone else informed of its activities. The crisis line agency agreed to handle administration for the steering committee, with other agencies offering to provide additional clerical help if needed.

The steering committee applied for a short-term employment grant to hire interviewers-researchers who would gather more information about family violence in Metro City and its surrounding towns. When their research report was ready, the steering committee called a meeting of all those who had contributed information, so they could all review the contents of the report.

The report said there were a number of services theoretically available, but they often were not focussed on the specific needs of those in abusive relationships, and efforts were not always co-ordinated. The report made an interesting observation: services might be irrelevant if nobody looked at the community attitudes and values that condoned violence within families. The report generated considerable discussion; especially when its contents were summarized in local media.

The steering committee's next few meetings were taken up with soul-searching about what to do next. Should they focus on the needs of abused persons? Of abusers? Or should they tackle the broader issue of community attitudes?

Their decision: to reduce family violence in the community, they would try to influence public attitudes.

HOW THE RURAL "COMMUNITIES" HANDLED STAGE TWO



In Evergreen District, four private citizens, and an FCSS director, had decided the issue of wife abuse was too big for one community to handle. They talked informally to people in the five communities in the district, to let people know wife abuse existed in their district, and to find out if others were concerned. When they had a few interested people in each community, they called a meeting of people from the five communities. The meeting was attended by police, social workers, a counsellor, four FCSS directors (the fifth community did not have FCSS), a lawyer and private citizens.

Having compared notes about what they did and did not know, the meeting participants decided that within their group they had enough contacts to find out the additional information they needed. The FCSS directors agreed to co-ordinate information gathering in their four respective communities, and one of the private citizens gathered information from the fifth community.

Three months later, the participants re-convened to compare notes. Throughout the district, those who had been contacted felt more wife abuse existed than was visible to the public or to agencies. Few services were available within the district. Several group members had heard stories of women too embarrassed to tell anyone their situation, with no means of transportation to counselling or emergency services outside of the district.

One of the participants offered to write a "district report" summarizing the information which had been gathered from the five communities. The group designated one person in each community who would distribute copies of the report to all those who had supplied information, to other interested individuals, and to local newspapers. The local contact people also arranged for community meetings at which the report was discussed.

Two months later the group met again to compare notes on the various community activities and to decide their next step. Though in one community they had encountered some attempt to discredit their report, they felt reasonably sure they had verified that "lack of emergency services" was a genuine district gap, and one that was recognized by some citizens in all five communities.

The group decided to focus its attention on "access to emergency services for abused women."

D. Barriers you may encounter during the need assessment stage

BARRIERS TO GETTING THE FACTS:

- Agencies may not have information about family violence, or may be unwilling to share information. Thus, it may be difficult to estimate the extent of the problem. (Be honest about limitations of your information.)
- Information about available services is sometimes hard to find.
- You may find a discrepancy between the services theoretically available, and actual service provided. (Be careful not to alienate agencies who could help, but who won't if they feel you are attacking or criticizing them.)

BARRIERS TO VERIFYING THE NEED:

- Outside people may challenge your information. (Make sure you can explain how you got your figures, how you identified what resources are available, and how you

came to your conclusions about what is needed.)

- Others may not agree with your interpretation of the information. (Listen to them, and check your conclusion — after all, you could be wrong!)

BARRIERS TO SETTING PRIORITIES:

- Thinking broadly — prevention, intervention, follow-up — may be hard in the face of pressure to "get a shelter" or some other crisis service.
- Different group members may strongly disagree on what the purpose of the group should be. You may lose some members.
- The group may not wish to examine its purpose and structure. If it doesn't, there may be later problems when group members try to accomplish incompatible goals, or the structure no longer helps get the job done.

E. Rewards from the need assessment stage

- You'll have a credible basis of information (make sure it **is** credible!) on which to base future action.
- The community will believe the needs are real. Your conversations with many people have laid the groundwork for future collaboration.
- You'll have a clear sense of direction, a structure to get the job done, and the most appropriate members to achieve the purpose.

PLAN YOUR STRATEGIES

- Objectives
- Logistics
- Resources

3

Planning Stage

STAGE THREE: PLAN YOUR STRATEGIES

A. Planning tasks

There are three tasks to be accomplished during the planning stage:

1. SET GOALS AND OBJECTIVES;
2. ORGANIZE LOGISTICS;
3. GATHER RESOURCES.

B. Why the planning stage is necessary

If you don't know where you're going (goals and objectives), you may end up somewhere else. If you don't know who's doing what (logistics), it might not get done. If you don't have the help you need (resources), you may not be able to help those in abusive relationships.

Planning will give your group a sense of direction and accomplishment, and help you focus your energy. Planning increases your chances of making a difference in your community.

C. How to carry out the planning tasks

1. Set goals and objectives

In light of community needs and gaps, and the group purpose, identify:

- what specific needs the group will address (these will become the group GOALS), and
- what will be accomplished in regard to each goal (these will be the OBJECTIVES).

EXAMPLE:

COMMUNITY NEED: FOLLOW-UP FOR ABUSED PERSONS

GOAL: to ensure abused women in crisis have on-going support, encouragement and

practical assistance for at least one year after the crisis.

OBJECTIVES:

- to develop a network of trained volunteers to stay in touch with women for one year after they leave emergency shelter or refuge.
- to encourage service agencies (e.g. public housing, counselling, employment training) to be aware of the special needs of abused women.

2. Organize logistics: Work out what must be done to accomplish the objectives: who will do what, by when, and how will you know it is done?

3. Gather resources: Identify what resources the group needs (time, expertise, facilities, publicity, money), and how it will obtain these.

HOW THE URBAN "COMMUNITY" CARRIED OUT THE PLANNING STAGE



The steering committee in Metro City had decided its purpose was to reduce family violence in their community, by influencing public attitudes.

The committee spent several meetings trying to define more specifically what they were trying to accomplish, and how they could do it. The process culminated with the following statement of goals:

1. **AWARENESS OF VIOLENCE** — raise the community's awareness of the abuse within families that exists in our community;
2. **ACKNOWLEDGE CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE** — help people acknowledge their own capacity for and/or involvement in violence;
3. **COMMUNICATE ALTERNATIVES FOR ANGER** — communicate the alternatives to cope with stress, anger and rage;
4. **COMMUNICATE COMMUNITY RESOURCES** — make the public aware of the program and treatment resources available in the Metro City area.

5. DEMONSTRATE EFFECTIVENESS/ MEASURE PREVENTIVE IMPACT of the campaign in reducing personal and family violence in the community.

Objectives to accomplish the goals included a media campaign; other public education activities; development of a questionnaire to help people assess their own stress/anger/hostility level; and a contest for "Ten Most Effective Ways to Prevent Violence." The campaign would culminate in the month of November, designated as "Stop Violence" month and featuring various special events.

The committee decided that with the scope of its activities, it should incorporate. The group became the "Stop Violence Coalition." A donor made possible the hiring of a full-time staff person. Steering committee members all became conveners of committees, which then involved dozens of other individuals and organizations in carrying out the details of the plan.

The committee relied on contributions of in-kind and donated services from corporations, organizations, foundations and individuals.

HOW THE RURAL "COMMUNITIES" CARRIED OUT THE PLANNING STAGE



Representatives from five communities in Evergreen District were aware of preventive and follow-up needs, but because of the lack of services in their district, they chose to focus on crisis needs. Their purpose was "to ensure abused women have access to appropriate emergency services."

After several meetings in which they grappled with issues such as what services were feasible within their rural district, they defined the following goals:

- 1. AWARENESS OF SERVICES** in the district, and in the nearest urban centre;
- 2. PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION** to ensure

local professionals in contact with wife abuse know how to respond effectively, and what services are available;

- 3. EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION** for abused women who require emergency services that cannot be provided within the district.

Objectives included the development of a community directory, publicity about available services, hosting workshops and in-service training events for professionals, and the development of a volunteer transportation network.

The group looked at its role and structure, and decided its role was to encourage and co-ordinate the achievement of their objectives. Their loose-knit unincorporated status seemed appropriate, but they worked with organizations in the five communities to form task groups who carried out the objectives.

Since the group did not directly sponsor any activities, but rather worked through other organizations, it did not require funds. It did, however, require a commitment of staff and volunteer time, and the use of some facilities.

D. Barriers you might encounter at the planning stage

- Sometimes people are reluctant to spend time identifying goals and objectives. They'd rather jump into action without any planning!
- Even though the group agrees on its objectives, it may disagree on how to accomplish the objectives. There could be friction within the group.

E. Rewards of the planning stage

- You'll have a sense of direction and achievement.
- You'll know you've thought out the best way to accomplish your objectives.
- Good planning increases your community credibility.

Action
Stage



**CARRY OUT
PLANS**

- Involve people
- Modify plans if necessary

STAGE FOUR: CARRY OUT PLANS — ACTION PHASE

A. The task (at last!) is to carry out the plans to achieve your objectives.

B. A few pointers

- Ensure that all relevant people are involved in your activities. For example, if you are dealing with “emergency transportation,” co-operate with other groups in the community who have a connection with transportation.
- Ensure that “key individuals” are informed of your plans and activities. If key individuals have objections, discuss them at your next meeting.
- Ensure that the public is informed of what you are doing. If you encounter resistance, go back and work some more on public awareness, and make sure you really have involved all the appropriate people.
- At each meeting, check to see how the plans are progressing. If an action doesn’t work out the way you expected, modify the plans.

C. Barriers you may encounter during the action stage

Every group has its stories of snags and roadblocks! Common sources are:

- different understandings among group members about what the group is trying to accomplish; different values and goals;
- lack of involvement by other significant people;
- lack of public support (this may translate into backlash against the project, or the

public being unwilling to supply necessary resources);

- inadequate planning; details overlooked;
- misunderstandings about who is responsible for what;
- poor communication among people carrying out the tasks.

D. Rewards

- Getting the job done! Helping to reduce family violence in your community.
- A sense of accomplishment

HOW THE URBAN “COMMUNITY” CARRIED OUT THE ACTION STAGE



In Metro City, the “Stop Violence Coalition,” with the help of a volunteer marketing person, identified concepts and strategies for a campaign, and a nine-month timetable of action plans that would culminate in “No-Hitter Month.” They took their ideas to an advertising agency, who agreed to “adopt” them (i.e. donate its services.)

Activities included:

- *A media campaign: television spots, posters, radio spots, news items, promoted the theme that “Violence is no comedy.”*
- *The mayors of Metro City and surrounding towns declared Stop Violence Month.*
- *The Parents Anonymous 24-hour crisis line became the “Violence Hotline” during Stop Violence Month.*
- *The pitcher of a local baseball team was named Honorary Chairperson of No-Hitter Day, and starred in a television public service announcement. On No-Hitter Day, the scoreboard at the stadium carried a message encouraging everyone to be a “no hitter.” On cue, the pitcher pitched a winning game.*
- *Shopping centre displays promoted No-Hitter Day.*

- A packet was sent to every church with a fact sheet about violence, and biblical references. Ministers, priests and rabbis were encouraged to devote a sermon to non-violent lifestyles.
- Buttons and bumper stickers said, "An assault free diet never killed anyone."
- 50,000 resource booklets gave clues to identifying anger, suggestions for alternatives for violent behavior, phone numbers of community services.
- A questionnaire printed in the daily paper helped people to realize the continuum of stress, anger, hostility and violence. The scoring system included suggestions for high scorers.
- A contest invited entries for the "Ten Most Effective Ways to Prevent Family Violence." The contest was judged by penitentiary inmates who had been convicted of violent offenses.
- Sponsoring a series of evening and one-day in-service training events to help professionals identify family violence, and learn effective intervention strategies.
- Initially the group planned to develop a 24-hour crisis line. Difficulties of how to preserve the anonymity of callers and volunteers in a small community — especially for people on a party line — convinced the group to go a different route. They are in the process of arranging a system whereby district residents can call toll-free to an urban crisis line which knows about Evergreen District services, and which can call back-up people in Evergreen District.
- Recruiting and training volunteer drivers who could take abused women to emergency shelter outside the District.
- After exploring the possibilities of providing emergency shelter within the district, the group felt the district couldn't afford to support a shelter. However, it did arrange for three anonymous homes in the country to be available as a "stopping place" for a few hours while emergency transportation could be arranged to emergency shelter outside the district.

HOW THE RURAL "COMMUNITIES" CARRIED OUT THE ACTION STAGE

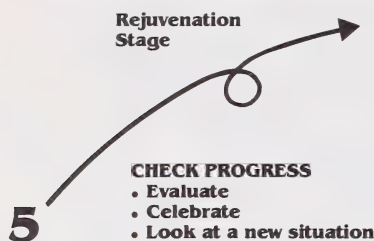


Through task groups in each of the five communities, the Evergreen District co-ordinating committee carried out a number of activities related to

their purpose of "ensuring abused women have access to appropriate emergency services."

Activities included:

- Development of a community directory of all services available within the district, and in the nearest urban centre. The directory was put in waiting areas of all agency offices, and was promoted in local newspapers.
- Hosting a one-day seminar for all district professionals who might have contact with family violence, to let them know about each other's services and referral procedures, and to let them know about services available in the nearest urban centre.



STAGE FIVE: EVALUATE AND CELEBRATE — REJUVENATION PHASE

At regular intervals — every few months in the early stages, and at least once a year later on — a group should assess and celebrate its progress, decide “How can we do it even better?” and “Where do we go from here?”



The Stop Violence Coalition in Metro City had established three criteria by which they would measure the project's effectiveness:

- 1. An increase in calls to the Violence Helpline.*
- 2. Increase in requests for service to community agencies.*
- 3. Decrease in the number of assaults handled by police during the campaign.*

Following the campaign, the Stop Violence Coalition reviewed each aspect of the campaign and made recommendations for the next year's activities.

(Our Metro City story was adapted from campaigns carried out by volunteer, government, religious and business representatives in Kansas City in 1982-83, and 1983-84.) The town of Hinton, Alberta carried out a similar campaign in 1986. Their guide was sent to all towns, villages and counties in the province to help plan activities for the first Alberta Family Violence Prevention Month in 1987.



The Evergreen District co-ordinating committee had developed the following criteria to evaluate their efforts:

- 1. Increase in calls and referrals to local services.*
- 2. Professional self-evaluation re: value of in-services.*
- 3. Increase in calls to urban crisis line from Evergreen District residents.*
- 4. Use of volunteer transportation network.*

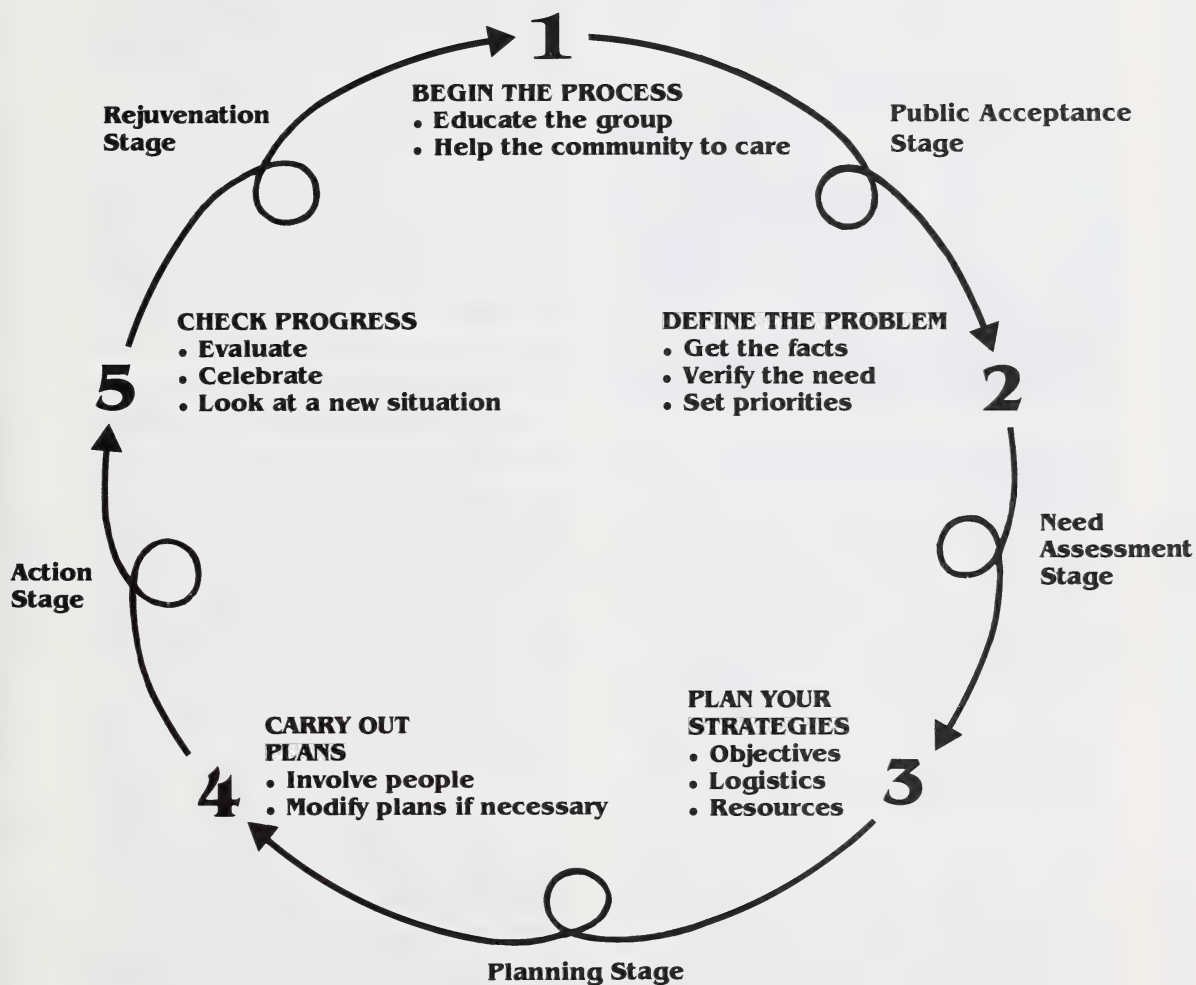
The co-ordinating committee now plans to update the community directory, hold further in-services, and develop volunteers to stay in touch with women who return from emergency shelters.

(Our Evergreen District story incorporates experiences of rural Alberta communities who are collaborating to develop district approaches to family violence.)

Remember, we have used wife abuse to illustrate how the community process works. The same process can be used to address any family violence problem.

Following a community process has greatly increased your chances of ensuring that "what's needed" to reduce family violence in your community becomes available.

A COMMUNITY PROCESS TO REDUCE FAMILY VIOLENCE



At a minimum, you have raised community awareness, become better informed yourselves, and learned many new skills. At best, you have changed community attitudes, you helped the community provide support to those in violent relationships and to those who work with them, and you have helped to reduce family violence in your community.

Congratulations!

C. ONE COMMUNITY PERSON'S EXPERIENCE



LETTER FROM A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

We started working on this project about four years ago. I got involved because I'd been appalled by reading about wife abuse, and I thought if there was something I could do to help, I'd like to. Besides, I couldn't say "no" when I was asked to sit on a committee! But I must confess I felt pretty naive when I started. I thought I was really out of my depth.

My husband had mixed feelings about me being involved in something for abused women. We've always been active in the community, but he wasn't totally comfortable with me being connected with this project. He was only partly joking when he said maybe I shouldn't go skiing for a while because if I fell and broke my leg or came home with bruises,

people would wonder if I was an abused wife!

We've certainly had our frustrations, both inside and outside our committee. For one thing, we were such a varied collection of people — some agency representatives and some ordinary interested citizens like me — and we had such different ideas about how to go about doing something, it took us a while to learn to work together. And "family violence" is such a horrendous problem, we really weren't sure where to start. Finally, we decided to focus on the problem of wife abuse.

I thought we should find out more about the problem before we took any action, but some of the committee members wanted to start a fundraising campaign right away. As far as I was concerned, I didn't know enough at that point to know what we would raise funds **for**, but we had a lot of "discussions" (arguments!) before I got my way.

I almost wished I hadn't. Trying to get information turned out to be a frustrating exercise. At that time, there was no central place you could call to get information, and we had a terrible time finding out even the basics of what causes family violence, how much of it went on in our community, what services were already available, and so on.

It seemed like a lot of different people had something to do with the problem — police and social workers and doctors and counsellors and judges — but none

of them talked to each other, and none of them wanted to talk to us. I got the feeling some of the professionals didn't have much use for volunteers.

We also wanted to talk to some families who had the problem, to find out what **they** thought might help, but of course part of the problem is that they don't want anyone to know they have a problem, so that was difficult. A women's shelter in another community put us in touch with some people who had broken out of a violent situation, and those people helped us understand what was needed.

Sometimes our committee would get so distracted by details that we'd lose sight of our purpose. At one point, we spent months debating whether we should be registered under the Societies Act, and then spent more months trying to write a constitution so we could be. Another time we spent a couple of months hassling over town zoning so we could build a women's shelter in a central location. Then we realized our community couldn't support a women's shelter anyway!

Trying to get the community interested in helping us was another problem. A lot of people didn't want to admit that family violence could happen in our community, or if they knew, they didn't want to talk about it. One of our committee members gave a talk to a service club, and we heard later that some of the club members didn't want anything to do with us because they thought we were trying to make wives

leave their husbands.

We knew from talking to groups in other communities that there was a definite danger of backlash against our project. In a small community — or even a big one — talking about family violence is pretty threatening and may stir up a lot more hornets' nests than talking about, say, children's playgrounds. The service club incident made us stop and think just how we could minimize the possibility of generating community hostility that could set us back for years. After that, we made sure all the influential people were kept informed about what we were thinking and doing; we bounced ideas off them; we involved them whenever we could; and we went slowly and carefully. If any committee member picked up negative messages from the community, we made it an agenda item and talked about how we could neutralize the message.

When I think of where we started and where we are now, I'm proud of what we've accomplished.

We've done a lot of public education, and it's beginning to pay off. Nobody says any more (at least, not in my hearing!) that "it couldn't happen in our community." And more people understand the cycle of violence, and that people caught in it are really just like the rest of us, only more so! We've sponsored professional in-services, so the people who first have contact with family violence can recognize the signs and know how to help.

We are now supported by town council and most of the service clubs and church groups (they don't dare criticize us in public any more!), and the agencies are talking to each other and at least trying to work together, in spite of their conflicting mandates. We've talked to police, and lawyers, and even judges (gently and respectfully, of course) about enforcement of laws to do with assault in cases of wife abuse.

We found a way to provide emergency transportation to a temporary safe place for abused women. We've made sure that each family in crisis has a volunteer that stays with them and helps them sort out the basics like housing and finances, as well as providing emotional support for at least a year. Our self-help groups have helped abused women get

enough self-confidence and skill to change destructive relationships, and there are even a few abusing men who appear to have stopped hitting their wives.

Last week was the highlight of my four-year involvement. One of the women who had been helped asked to attend our committee meeting. Of course, we normally never meet the people who use our services, so it was a very special event. I listened to her story, and I found I had a lump in my throat. I was happy that she and her family are beginning to get back on their feet, and gratified that our services had been part of it.

I know we — and she — have other struggles ahead of us, but I also know it will be worth the hassle. We'll make it!

NOTES:



BREAKING THE PATTERN

How Alberta
Communities
Can Help